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BUSH SAYS U.S. SECURITY HAS IMPROVED SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

United States is now safer and is winning the war against terrorism, he says

Washington -- President Bush said the United States is safer than it was at the time of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and is "winning the War on Terror" through vigilance, determination and courage.

Speaking in Marietta, Georgia, September 7 in his fourth in a series of speeches on the War on Terror, Bush said the United States has "learned the lessons" of September 11, 2001.

"[W]e have addressed the gaps in our defenses exposed by that attack. We've gone on the offense against our enemies and transformed former adversaries into allies. We have put in place the institutions needed to win this war," he said.

In the offensive against terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida, the president said the United States and its allies are using financial, diplomatic and intelligence tools, as well as military tools, to disrupt the terrorists' day-to-day operations.

"Because we're on the offensive, it's more difficult for al-Qaida to transfer money through the international banking system. Because we're on the offense, al-Qaida can no longer communicate openly without fear

of destruction. And because we're on the offense, al-Qaida can no longer move widely without fearing for their lives," he said.

Bush said one of the lessons from the 2001 attacks is the need to keep "steady pressure, unrelenting pressure, on al-Qaida and its associates."

The United States and its allies have kept terrorist forces from achieving their key goal of overthrowing governments across the broader Middle East in order to seize control. On the contrary, two of their targets, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, are among the United States' "most valuable allies in the War on Terror," and former state sponsors of terror such as Afghanistan and Iraq now are helping fight terrorism as democratic nations.

More than 90 nations are united in the fight against terrorism, "to dry up their funds, to stop their plots and to bring them to justice," a force Bush described as "the largest coalition in the history of warfare."

To combat radicalism, the United States is supporting democratic leaders and reformers across the broader Middle East. "We're supporting the voices of tolerance and moderation in the Muslim world. We're standing with mothers and fathers in every culture who want to see their children grow up in a caring and peaceful world," the president said.

By changing conditions that encourage radicalism and hatred and replacing "violent dictatorships with peaceful democracies," the United States and its allies will make the world more secure, Bush said.

NEW HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL SESSIONS DISAPPOINTING, SAYS STATE OFFICIAL

United States committed to improving U.N. council

By Carolee Walker
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – Many of the new U.N. Human Rights Council's collective decisions have been troubling, even if the records of its individual members represent a slight improvement over those of the now defunct Commission on Human Rights, said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mark Lagon at a congressional hearing on September 6.

"The United States is committed to improving this United Nations body, although unfortunately the new council's sessions so far have been disappointing," Lagon said.

"We believe that the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights defenders around the globe requires our best effort," he added.

The new Human Rights Council met for the first time in June in Geneva.

Erica Barks-Ruggles, deputy assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, testified that the record of the Human Rights Council (HRC) is mixed with regard to membership, a factor that continues to pose the greatest concern for the United States. Serious human rights violators such as Sudan, Iran and Zimbabwe are not members, she said, but Cuba has retained its seat and "enjoys a disproportionately influential role in the U.N.'s chief human rights body." Barks-Ruggles also said she is concerned about the change in allocation of seats by region.

"Over half of the HRC seats are occupied by African, Asian and Eastern European members, regions with mixed records on human rights," she reported.

“This is significant because many African and Asian countries tend to favor economic, social and cultural rights over civil and political rights,” Lagon said. “These regional groups have historically sought to eliminate country-specific resolutions, which the U.S. has always considered a crucial human rights tool.”

Although countries campaigning for HRC membership are required to make public pledges about how they would enforce human rights obligations and standards, both at home and abroad, Barks-Ruggles said, making pledges is not enough.

“We acknowledge the significance of this step, but the follow-up on these pledges – both in terms of what is delivered and how those governments that do not measure up will be judged by their fellow members – will determine whether this is more than lip service,” she said. “We will be watching closely.”

Forty-seven countries are members of the council. The United States elected not to join, citing concerns about criteria for membership not being strong enough to keep human rights abusers off the HRC. (See related article.)

Barks-Ruggles said she was encouraged that the new universal periodic review, which subjects council members to review before other countries, kept some countries, especially Egypt, Eritrea, Guinea and Zimbabwe, off the HRC. Barks-Ruggles was disappointed, however, that China was elected to the council.

One of the HRC’s essential tools is the ability to offer technical assistance and to call special sessions to discuss emerging human rights situations, Barks-Ruggles said.

“After all, it is better to address human rights problems as they are beginning to emerge rather than when there is a full-blown crisis,” she said.

Transcripts of testimony by Lagon and Barks-Ruggles at the congressional hearing entitled “U.N. Human Rights Council: Reform or Regression” will be available on the Web site of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

MORE NATIONS SEE THROUGH IRAN’S NUCLEAR CLAIMS, U.S. ENVOY SAYS

Ambassador Schulte says Iran must respect international demands or face sanctions

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Washington File Security Affairs Writer

Washington – An increasing number of nations are agreeing with the United States that Iran’s nuclear activities are not consistent with its professed peaceful intentions, says a senior U.S. official based in Austria.

Ambassador Gregory Schulte told the Press Club Concordia in Vienna, Austria, September 5 that Iran’s dogged pursuit of uranium enrichment and plutonium production are not needed for civil nuclear energy, but they are “the two primary means for producing material for a nuclear weapon.”

Past overtures to the Iranian government by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Mohammad ElBaradei have fallen on deaf ears, according to Schulte, who represents the United States at the U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Vienna.

ElBaradei’s August 31 report on Iran’s nuclear program demonstrates Iran’s repeated stonewalling of IAEA efforts to gain access to requested information, Schulte said. Even after trying for three years, the IAEA chief still cannot certify

the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, added Schulte, who also represents the United States at the IAEA.

"Iran has failed to satisfy IAEA concerns about its work on advanced centrifuges," the U.S. ambassador said.

Iranian leaders have ignored U.N. requirements, shown disrespect for their international obligations, and remained defiant of international concerns, Schulte said.

"More and more governments have come to the same conclusions as my own," he said: "That Iran's nuclear program – with its history of secrecy and violations, its ties to the A.Q. Khan network, its connections to Iran's military – is actually a cover for developing nuclear weapons."

The U.S. goal remains to hammer out a diplomatic solution, said Schulte -- one in which Iranian leaders "give up their pursuit of nuclear weapons and fully meet their international obligations."

That is why U.S. officials are working with their counterparts in Europe, Russia, China and elsewhere to offer a clear choice to Tehran, the ambassador said.

The positive, constructive choice that would best benefit the Iranian people would be for the Iranian government "to cooperate with the international community and to take credible steps to assure the world that their nuclear program is solely peaceful," Schulte said.

Schulte said this process has to start with Iran meeting IAEA and U.N. Security Council requirements "to suspend all activities related [to] uranium enrichment and plutonium production."

Absent that, the official said, international sanctions should be imposed on Iran "in a graduated fashion."

INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS SHOULD BE TARGETED

Sanctions are an integral part of the international diplomatic effort, Schulte said, and they should "target Iran's weapons program[s] and those who guide and support them."

Such sanctions, he said, "will help Iran's leaders understand that international obligations are to be treated seriously." Tehran's leaders "must understand that their choices have consequences, and that their best choice remains a course of cooperation and negotiation," Schulte said.

He added that Iran also should understand that a negative choice "could spark a nuclear arms race in one of the world's most volatile regions," and potentially could destroy the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- "a cornerstone of international peace and security" -- to which Tehran is a signatory.

HOW CLOSE IS IRAN TO A NUCLEAR WEAPON?

It is a subject of debate how close Iran might be to developing a nuclear weapon. Israeli sources have suggested Iran might be only a couple years away from that point, but U.S. intelligence sources place that stage further in the future. Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte told National Public Radio September 1 that Iran likely will achieve a nuclear weapon capability in five years to 10 years if it continues to pursue its nuclear ambitions.

The U.S. intelligence community estimates that Iran will conclude the necessary developments "sometime beginning in the next decade," Negroponte said, or perhaps in "the middle of the next decade."

The Iranians have engaged in a process of "denial and deception" with respect to their nuclear intentions, Negroponte said. That process made it difficult for intelligence analysts to "know whether there's a secret military program and to what extent that program has made progress."

U.S., CHINA UNITED IN SEEKING DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION ON NORTH KOREA

State's Hill renews call for North Korea to return to Six-Party Talks

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States and China remain united in seeking a diplomatic solution to North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, says Ambassador Christopher Hill, the top U.S. negotiator for the Six-Party Talks, which are aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Hill is in Beijing for bilateral talks with his Chinese government counterparts. Speaking with reporters September 6, Hill said: "China remains very focused on how to get the diplomacy working again."

September 19 will mark one year since North Korea agreed to take steps to end its nuclear weapons programs after a series of arduous talks hosted by China in Beijing.

But North Korea since has refused to live up to its agreement and refuses to return to the Six-Party negotiating table with South Korea, China, Russia, Japan and the United States.

"[O]ne of the real benefits of the Six-Party process," Hill said, "is how it has brought the U.S. and China more closely together. We've really appreciated the work China has done, especially the work in organizing the process and getting everyone to the table."

Hill was in Tokyo September 4-6 for bilateral talks, where he discussed the Proliferation Security Initiative as a way to deal with Pyongyang's recalcitrance.

In both Tokyo and Beijing, Hill said, he discussed U.N. Security Council Resolution 1695. The U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted the resolution -- its first on North Korea since 1993 -- just 11 days after North Korea test-fired on July 5 several missiles capable of reaching Japan and, possibly, Alaska in the United States.

The resolution demands North Korea suspend all activities related to its ballistic missile program, requires U.N. member states to refrain from trading with North Korea on missile-related goods and technology, and urges North Korea to return immediately and without preconditions to the Six-Party Talks with South Korea, Russia, Japan, China and the United States.

While in Tokyo, Hill emphasized that "it's very important it [Resolution 1695] be followed up by concrete action that it calls all its member states to take."

While in China, Hill plans to visit Chengdu, Guangzhou and Shanghai. The assistant secretary also is scheduled to visit Seoul, South Korea, before returning to Washington.

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun will be traveling to the United States to meet with President Bush at the White House September 14. The Six-Party Talks are among the many topics they are expected to discuss.

UNITED STATES HELPING ANGOLA DESTROY SURPLUS SMALL ARMS

New photo essay highlights weapons removal efforts in embattled region

Washington – A newly released State Department photo essay highlights U.S. support for Angola's efforts to deal with more than 2 million excess small arms and light weapons that accumulated there during nearly 30 years of civil war.

The images document a June project sponsored by State's Office Of Weapons Removal and Abatement to convert 1,577 light weapons into scrap metal and safely dispose of more than 800 pieces of unexploded and abandoned land mines and artillery shells.

The proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in regions of the world suffering from political instability and violent conflict has proven a major obstacle to peace, economic development and efforts to rebuild war-torn societies. In places like Afghanistan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Colombia, thousands of civilians have been killed and tens of thousands more displaced by ethnic and civil conflicts perpetuated in large part by easy access to illicit weaponry.

In Huambo, Angola, the State Department awarded a \$447,000 grant to the HALO Trust, a British nongovernmental organization that specializes in armaments removal, which worked with Angolan authorities to collect, record and finally destroy the weapons using a massive shredding machine, converting them into scrap metal that can be used for peaceful purposes. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are pursuing similar projects in Angola, according to the State Department.

Worldwide, the United States has provided more than \$27.5 million to destroy approximately 900,000 small arms and light weapons and more than 80 million pieces of ammunition in 25 countries, a record of assistance unmatched by any other nation.

The United States is one of approximately 22 countries that help states to better secure or destroy small arms and light weapons, preventing their use in regional conflicts, terrorist attacks or their entry into international illicit arms trafficking networks.